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ABSTRACT

This study tracked the language preference of three French/English bilingual children, twin girls aged 12.8 and a boy 14.8, over a five year period. Their parents, who are also the authors, actively worked to raise them bilingual. The girls were enrolled in a school French immersion program throughout the study. Their brother had only one semester of French immersion. The study used weekly tape recorded conversations of family dinnertime conversations both in the children's Louisiana home and at their summer residence in French-speaking Quebec. The researchers listened to each recorded conversation and tabulated the number of distinct, individual French and English words (spoken both by the children and their parents). Data analysis indicated that the children's home language preference in Louisiana shifted from predominantly French to overwhelmingly English as they moved from pre-adolescence into early adolescence. However, throughout the 5 years, during summers immersed in French-speaking Quebec, the children's language preference shifted from English to French within weeks. The researchers conclude that the children's preference for English in Louisiana related to the increasing influence of the external, American peer environments. Parental linguistic influence on the children waned over the 5 years. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

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A Fourteen Year Case Study to Rear Bilingual Children in Monolingual America: The Effect of Adolescence on Language Preference

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abstract

This study tracks the language preference of three French/English bilingual children, twin girls aged 12.8 and a boy14.8, over a five year period. Using weekly tape recorded conversations of family dinnertime conversations both in the children's Louisiana home, and their summer residence in French-speaking Québec, the bilingual authors–who are also the parents–are able to plot dramatic language shifts in the home between a predominately English speaking and French speaking social context. Moreover, the authors are also able to demonstrate that as the children move into adolescence, English speaking increases markedly in the Louisiana home, but French speaking remains uniformly high in Quebec. These trends are linked to increasing peer pressure outside the home in both Louisiana and Quebec.

A Fourteen Year Case Study to Rear Bilingual Children in Monolingual America: The Effect of Adolescence on Language Preference

Rearing children to be bilingual in a monolingual environment is a very big challenge. It requires a good deal of long term commitment on the part of at least one, and preferably more than one caretaker's part. It necessitates providing the children almost constant exposure to the non-community, minority language. In spite of the challenge, evidence abounds of children successfully acquiring two languages at the same time, even though one of the two languages is not being reinforced outside of the home. However, most of the research on child bilingualism to date has focused on the acquisition of language by young children, with little or no follow-up on the language usage of those bilingual children once they enter adolescence. Exceptions include Saunders (1988), though his study stops with his oldest child reaching age 13.

Given what we know of adolescent development, and of the increasing external pressure on individuals as they enter adolescence to behaviorally conform to their peer groups, one would expect these normative pressures to extend to speech behavior as well. Language is very closely associated with nation, culture, and ethnicity, all components of a person's self-identity (Fishman, 1985a; Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 1999). A key identifying characteristic of adolescence, in particular, is the individual's struggle to come to terms with the very personal issue of who they are (Erikson, 1968), and how they "fit in" in their various social contexts (Rotheram-Borus, 1989). We would expect, therefore, that bilingual adolescents would use language in ways that validate their developing self-images. We would also expect that bilingual adolescents

immersed in a monolingual culture would have additional identity pressures, as they reconcile conflicting societal messages about what it means to be a part of one—or more likely two—larger societies

In the United States in particular, there exists tremendous pressure to conform to the linguistic norm of speaking English (Caldas, 1998). Even in the large Hispanic-American community, where literally tens of millions of individuals speak the U.S.'s second most spoken language, young people feel the pressure to speak English. Indeed, most second generation Hispanics prefer to speak English, and by the third generation most Hispanic Americans are no longer even able to speak Spanish (Portes & Schauffler 1994, 1996). How much more, then, must bilingual adolescents in America's much smaller linguistic communities feel social pressure to conform linguistically to the country's "English standard."

The current study attempts to clarify and extend some understanding in this critical area by following the "bilingual preference" of three American/Québécois adolescents over a five year period. The subjects spent the academic school years in Louisiana, and the summer months in Québec. The twin girls, who were enrolled in a Louisiana school French immersion program throughout the 5 year study, were aged 12.8, and their older brother–who had only one semester of school French immersion–was aged14.8 at the end of the current study period in December 1999. Thus, the effects of a school French immersion program on adolescent bilingual preference can be gauged as well as the effect on language choice of entering into and moving through adolescence. In earlier research, the authors, who are also the

parents, clarified the concept of "bilingual preference," demonstrating that a bilingual's preference for either of his or her two languages is context sensitive (cites omitted for anonymity). Then, the authors operationalized a measure of this construct which they call the Bilingual Preference Ratio, or BPR. We show that the context with the greatest influence on the children's propensity to speak either English or French in a bilingual home is the linguistic community within which they are immersed. We show how simply living in either language community dictates the language used in the household among the family members who all have the ability to communicate fluently in either French or English. Even though the children had greater measured proficiency in English–i.e. superior mastery of its syntax, grammar, and other language skills due to much more exposure to the American language–they still preferred to speak French amongst themselves and with their parents when in French-speaking Québec.

In this study, we extend our previous research by considering the variable "adolescence" as a possible factor influencing the children's language preference in the home, in both the U.S. and Québec. Specifically, we focus on three questions. First, we ask whether or not the children are more or less likely to speak either of their two languages, as they progress through adolescence, when in either predominantly English or French speaking environments. Secondly, we ask whether or not the previously identified French-speaking gap between the older boy and younger twin girls either diverges or converges as the children move through adolescence. Thirdly, we examine the data for evidence which indicates whether or not the twins school French immersion experience could be effecting home French speaking in a different way from

their older brother as they move into adolescence. Finally, we attempt to explain any apparent effect of adolescent progression on the children's language preferences in terms of adolescent self-concept theory.

Context of Study

In 1985, in an effort to rear children capable of speaking two languages, as well as contribute to the survival of French in Louisiana, the authors jointly and methodically devised a plan to rear their three children to be French/English bilinguals in a predominantly English-speaking environment. Our plan stipulated that both parents speak only French to the children. The mother, and co-author of this study is a native French-speaking Canadian, who has lived in Louisiana since 1980, and teaches in an elementary school French-immersion program. The father is a native-born American citizen, who was reared in English, and is a university professor. The family is classified as middle to upper-middle class. Both authors learned each other's native language through study and cultural immersion during almost twenty years of marriage, and consider themselves literate, fluent speakers of both French and English.

The study children have spent all of their academic school years in predominantly English-speaking Louisiana. Even so, the family has resided in the heart of *culturally* French Louisiana from 1995 through 1999, where according to the 1990 U.S. Census up to fifty percent of the population, mostly individuals older than fifty, still speak French (Henry & Bankston, 1999). During this same time frame, for

approximately two months each summer, the family has resided together in the French-speaking Canadian province of Québec. Previous research demonstrates that the children are fluent speakers of French and English, with dramatic fluctuations between French and English preference largely dependent on whether the children are in English-speaking Louisiana or French-speaking Canada (cites omitted). In general, on author-constructed questionnaires the children rate themselves as more proficient speakers of English, though they also rate themselves as at least fair speakers of French, with one of the twin girls rating herself as equally proficient in both languages. The children's several native French-speaking teachers in both Louisiana and Québec have substantiated and corroborated the children's perceptions in their comments on other author-constructed surveys for this purpose. All their teacher have indicated that the children could function well in a francophone school on their age level.

Research Methodology

Measure of Bilingual Preference

We measure our the children's "bilingual preference" using the author-constructed bilingual preference ratio—BPR for short (cite omitted for anonymity). We use the following formula, also used by Edelman (1969) though for different purposes, to calculate a ratio of French to English "preference." The algorithm used is as follows:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of French words - number of English words}}{\text{Larger of the two}}\right) + 1 \div 2$$

Values can range from 0 to 1.0. Coefficients greater than 0.5 indicate French preference; coefficients less than 0.5 indicate English preference.

We derived our BPR's from weekly audio taped recordings of family mealtime conversations from December 1994 through December 1999 in both Louisiana and during summertime stays at the family's Québec residence. We omitted January 1996 recordings from the study due to so few words on tape, as well as July and August 1998 due to a bad audio tape. This left us with just one recording from French Canada during the summer of 1998, a limitation we will revisit shortly in discussing the results. The recordings are ten-minute snippets of relaxed, natural family communications around the dinner table, usually at the evening meal. We averaged approximately three recordings per month. Family mealtime conversations are very important social contexts within which language socialization takes place (Blum-Kulka, 1994; Pan, 1995), and studying dinnertime bilingual speech has been employed in other seminal linguistic research (Lanza, 1992). Importantly, this is the sole context that remained constant for all five family members over the entire study period, regardless of which country we were in. During this five year time frame, the twin girls' ages spanned from 7.8 to 12.8, and the boy's age frame was from 9.8 to 14.8. On a cautionary note, much research has underscored the importance of "topic" in influencing the choice of language, an omitted variable of the current study.

In the beginning, when the children asked about the recorder, we responded truthfully that we were taping their conversations to study how they were learning to speak both French and English. After a couple of weeks, they almost never seemed to

notice they were being taped. Once the tape was rolling, the authors tended to forget as well, as the recorder was in an inconspicuous spot next to the table.

The authors analyzed the tape recordings by listening to five-minute clips of each recording session during the five year period, and tabulating the number of distinct, individual French and English *words* (tokens) uttered by the boy separately, and the girls together. (Each author recorded his/her tallies separately.) Trying to make a distinction between the twins' audio taped speech proved too difficult. However, we believe that it makes sense conceptually to view the twins together. For one, they are the same age, and have been spoken to by us in French since birth (The father addressed the boy exclusively in English until age one and a half.) Also, the girls are almost inseparable in play at home, and at school have been in the same French immersion classrooms. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, they are identical twins, and are as physically and genetically similar as two human beings can be, with quite similar voices.

In order to have an objective measure of how much French each parent was speaking, and to have some indication of whether or not we were speaking more French than English in the household (as was the plan), we went through the same aforementioned procedure for both parents. We listened to the tapes, and separately tallied the number of French and English words which we heard each one speak. To date, we have only tabulated the parents' English and French speaking for the years 1997, 1998, and 1999. However, we believe three years is ample time to give a fair approximation of how much French we are speaking at dinnertime, and by extension, to

a limited extent, at other times as well.

After the tallying was completed, we added together the total number of French and English words heard separately by each author for each month for each subject in the study. As a check on interrater reliability, we correlated the tallies of each author for each month in French and English, using Pearson's *r* as a reliability coefficient. We generated separate reliability coefficients for the authors' tallies of John, the twins, the mother, and the father. Each reliability coefficient was .94 or greater, except for French tallies for the father, where the coefficient was a still relatively robust .60. A comparison of the total word counts revealed that the French-Canadian researcher heard consistently more French spoken on tape by her co-author than he heard himself speak. Still, in general, the rest of the coefficients were quite large, and indicate that both researchers' tallies of numbers of French and English words were remarkably similar, and consistent.

Next, we created an average of the two researchers' total word counts for each month. For example, we added together the number of words the father heard the boy utter on tape in a given month (e.g., 200) and the number heard by the mother (e.g., 250), and divided by two. This was done to average out some of the error associated with using just one rater (Linn & Gronlund, 2000). Then, we used the Edelman formula to calculate a French to English proportion, or ratio, in order to determine overall language *preference* for each month. We refer to this as the bilingual preference ratio, or BPR. The values can range from zero (no French) to 1.0 (only French). A value of .50 would indicate a perfect balance between French and English words (50% in each

language), a situation we believe may come closest to capturing what is truly "balanced bilingualism."

We use the individual monthly BPR's in our correlational analyses. However, in order to more clearly present the children's language preferences while both in Louisiana, and in Québec, we calculate average BPR's for each child, and each parent, for each year, in each separate language context–Louisiana and Québec. In this way, we can more clearly see, compare, and interpret broad trends. Finally, a total ratio for the Louisiana and Québec language contexts is computed to give us a global index of French language preference for each family member. In addition to our quantitative measures of language preference, we also use the lead author's field notes which include observations of his children's language development over the five year period. These notes "put flesh on the numbers," and help illuminate the empirical findings.

RESULTS

The Louisiana Language Context

For ease of presentation and interpretation, we have broken down the analysis of the results into three sections: the children's bilingual preference in Louisiana, the children's bilingual preference during the summer seasons in Québec, and the parents' bilingual preference in both locals. Figure 1 shows the average Louisiana BPR's for John, and the twins, for each of the five years they spent in Louisiana from 1995 through 1999.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

Each average BPR is based on approximately 10 months (August through May) of recordings. What we see is that in 1995, when John was in the fourth and fifth grades (age 9.8 in January 95), and the twins were in the second and third grades (age 7.8 in 95) , that well over three-quarters of all the words uttered by the three children in recorded dinnertime conversations were in French. It should be noted that it was only during the spring of 1995, the first semester under consideration, that John was enrolled in a school French immersion program. An examination of each individual month's BPR during this first year reveals that the bulk of John's French was uttered during this spring semester when he was exposed to French in the school as well as at home. His French-speaking fell off fairly dramatically in the fall.

During the next year—1996—when John turned eleven years of age, and the girls turned nine, John's French speaking around the family table in Louisiana plummeted drastically, to a BPR of .27, or slightly more that one-quarter of all the words he uttered. His twin sisters' French speaking, however, actually increased slightly, to 86% of all the words they spoke. Notably, the twins continued in school French immersion, where approximately 50% of each school day was spent in academic classes (i.e, Math, Social Studies, and Science) which were taught in French by native French speakers. However, John not only ceased receiving any formal French instruction of any kind in his Louisiana school during 1996, but it was obvious that he exhibiting the "signs" of early adolescence. During this time the authors noted John's increasing awareness of and attention to his peers. For example, he developed his first

"crush" during the 95-96 school year.

During the year 1997, when John transitioned from the sixth to the seventh grade, his Louisiana French speaking fell off even further, decreasing from .27 to .04, or only 4% of all his recorded utterances. Ironically, he was enrolled for a one hour French class during the seventh grade. Regarding his self-perception of his bilingualism, John made a telling comment to his father during the spring of 1997 when asked if he spoke French with one of his French/English bilingual friends. He responded that, "It's not cool to speak French in school." Whereas a comment like this might not be surprising in most U.S. schools, in John's middle school most students are of French descent, have relatives (usually grandparents) who speak French, and take French as an elective, as he did in this year. On a couple of other occasions during 1997, he expressed embarrassment when his mother and father spoke to him in French within earshot of his schoolmates. It was clear he wanted to fit in, and not just in how he spoke. In the domain of clothes, though there was no formal uniform at his large public middle school of 800 students, the authors remarked how similarly most of the students dressed, wearing the same baggy khaki pants of the same brand name, the same casual boots (of a popular brand name), and a t-shirt with a logo. Music, also, was an important rallying point of identification between John and his group of school friends.

In 1997, the twins collective French speaking took a slight, much less precipitous dip, falling from a BPR of .86 to .74, or just under three-quarters of all their dinnertime utterances. Perhaps significantly, they were at this time the same age which John was in 1995—10— when his BPR was only a slightly higher .83, and as high as it would

ever become during the study period in Louisiana. In other words, they too were poised on the edge of adolescence, and their BPR for this calendar year can be used as a baseline against which to compare future BPR changes with changes their brother experienced following his turning ten years of age.

In 1998, John entered the seventh grade—and his teenaged years. There was no doubt to his parents that his American school peer group had become for him an all-absorbing, important social institution to which he 'needed' to fit-in at all levels, including music, dress—and speech. Moreover, John's attitude toward bilingualism continued to transfer to the linguistic context of the home, where he was far from the earshot of his classmates. In the year 1998, his French speaking around the table essentially stopped, with a measured BPR of .003, or less than one-third of one-percent of all words spoken around the table being French. Entire months went by without John saying one word around the table on tape in French. The twins' French-speaking fell-off drastically too, even though they were still in a French immersion program, and even though almost all their peers were girls and boys enrolled in the French-intensive program. The twin girls' BPR decreased from .74 in 1997, to just .03 in 1998, or only three uttered French words out of a hundred around the dinner table. In fact, this yearly decrease in a BPR is the steepest percentage point decrease, 73 points, to occur among any family members in the Louisiana context in a one year period. This massive shift in language preference corresponds with John's big decrease two years earlier–when he was the same chronological age as they were in 1998, i.e. eleven years of age. That their BPR decrease was more precipitous than was

his, though, may be explained in part by John's English-speaking presence around the table in 1998, a depressing effect on French speaking which was not present in the family two years earlier. In other words, John may likely have contributed to a home atmosphere which was more conducive to English than French—in spite of the parents' efforts to the contrary (more on the parents below). It did not help that he at times even teased his sisters for speaking French, or mixing French with their English.

In 1999, when John entered the ninth grade and the girls entered the seventh grade, essentially all recorded communication around the table by the three siblings was in English. Indeed, the girls measured BPR of .002 was marginally smaller than even John's minuscule .003, and represented significantly less French-speaking than even John manifested two years earlier when he was the twins' age (12). This is striking, since in 1999 the girls were still in a French immersion program where three of their academic classes were taught in French, and their peer group and close friends were still all children enrolled in the French immersion program, and who were all able to speak in French—if they so desired. From the authors' perspective, however, there seemed to be little desire among the twin's French-immersion friends to speak French among themselves outside of the classroom.

Given that this very tight, almost insular group of French-immersion friends participated in many extra-curricular activities together, the authors had ample opportunities over the five years to observe the social interaction of this group both within school and without. It was a rare occasion indeed when they spoke French among themselves in relaxed conversation. When the lead author greeted one of the

students in French, they would often respond in French, but then almost immediately shift back into English. Indeed, the pressure in this peer group to speak English was so great, that during 1999, one of the twins admonished the father on several occasions not to speak to her in French among her French-immersion friends!

So, we see that both John and his twin sisters began the period speaking much more French than English in the French-speaking home environment of Louisiana. However, we see that as John moved into early adolescence, at around age 11, his home French-speaking fell off drastically, until he essentially stopped speaking the minority home language around the dinner table. We see basically the same pattern for the twin girls as well, with most of their utterances around the table in French until they also turned eleven years old, at which point their French-speaking plummets even more steeply than their brother when he was the same age. Still, overall, the twins had a greater preference for French over the five year period than did John. Their average global BPR for the entire five year Louisiana context was .49, or almost perfect balance between French and English. John's global Louisiana BPR over the same period was a much smaller .23. However, these differences between the twins and John are consistent with the fact that John's adolescence was more advanced over this period, and one would therefore expect peer influences over his home language preference to be more pronounced.

We now turn to the question of whether this same pattern of increasing English speaking in the home with progressing adolescence also takes place around the dinner table in French-speaking Québec. That is, is the children's increasing preference for

English a consequence of their more powerful peer environment in the United States, which will also spill over to their family communications in Québec.

The Québec Language Context

During this same five year period, from 1995 through 1999, the five member family spent approximately 2 months each summer at a residence in the very heart of French-speaking Québec. Here, except among themselves or with their parents, the children had no recourse to English. They spent their summers either in a local all-French speaking summer camp, or with monolingual French speaking relatives of the mother, or with French-speaking native Québécois friends. At home, they watched French-speaking television. However, just as in Louisiana, the immediate family also shared meals alone together where the children had the free choice of speaking either French or English. Which language did they prefer?

As can be seen in Figure 2, during the first summer in 1995, when John was 10 and the twins were 8 years of age, the vast majority of the children' utterances around the dinner table in Québec were in French.

[insert Figure 2 about here]

Indeed, with BPR's of .91 and .99, John and the twins had a greater preference for speaking French, respectively, than they exhibited in Louisiana during this same calendar year. This greater propensity to speak French in Canada, however, is easier to account for, since their days were filled with French, and it would be logical to expect that when speaking of the day's activities around the table they would resort to the

language within which the activities were conducted—French. Also, they attended a French-speaking elementary school near the home for the final three weeks of the academic school year in both June 1995 and June 1996. However, the sheer magnitude of the BPR's is notable, since, after all, they could have spoken English if they so chose.

After the return to Louisiana, John's BPR feel off fairly dramatically after re-immersion in English (.27 in 1996)—and the onset of adolescence. However, during the next summer of 1996, the children's BPR's shot up once again. In fact, though this is the year that John's French speaking fell of steeply in Louisiana, his French speaking in Québec actually increased 7 percentage points over the previous year, from 91 percent to 97 percent of all words spoken around the Québec family dinner table. It is important to note that the author's once again enrolled the three children in an all French-speaking school for the first three weeks of June. Thus, the children were immersed in peer groups which could only speak French. John even had the highest score on a French spelling test, and seemed to very much be taken with his Québécois peers, who reciprocated their friendship. What we see with John, then, as he moves into early adolescence, is a trend toward much greater English-speaking in Louisiana, but also greater French-speaking in Québec. In fact, there was little room for him to increase his French speaking in Québec in 1996, as he was approaching 100 percent of uttered words in French.

Once again, a year latter during the summer of 1997 the children spoke almost only French around the family dinner table in Québec. This is notable, since in this year

John's French-speaking in Louisiana continued its very steep plummet. His French-speaking in Québec, however, decreased a very small 2 percentage points, to a BPR of .95. The twin's collective French speaking actually increased to the point where all English speaking ceased.

The results from the summer of 1998 must be interpreted with caution. The cassette we used was defective, though we did not realize this until after our return to Louisiana. Thus, we only have one recorded session of dinnertime conversation from around our Canadian table. However, the results are telling. The data we use to compute the family's BPR's come from a recording only 9 days into our summer stay. Based on a study of weekly BPR's from previous summer recordings, we noted there is still somewhat of a residual effect of American English on family communications within the first weeks of arriving in Canada. With this in mind, the magnitude of the children's BPR's seem all the more impressive. After only a week and a half in a French-speaking environment, John's BPR had already risen to .83 (from 0.0 in the month of May) while the twin's BPR rose almost as high, to .79. In other words, more than three-fourths of the words uttered by the children around the dinner table were in French not even two weeks after leaving their American peer environments, where in the month of May John uttered not one recorded French word around our family dinner table, and the twins spoke only ten French words in a month. No doubt, had the tape not malfunctioned, these BPR's would have been even higher had latter summer dates been included.

This reasoning is justified when we consider the children's summer 1999 BPR's, a year later, when John was already 14 years of age, and the twins were 12. During

this last summer of the study, both John's (.94) and the twin's (.92) Québec BPR's indicate that well over 90 percent of their recorded dinnertime utterances were in French. Given that they had essentially stopped speaking French around the table in Louisiana right up to the eve of the summer vacation, we believe this sudden and drastic shift back into French is strong evidence for the overwhelming influence of the French-speaking peer-environment—and lack of an English speaking peer environment—on the children's language usage.

However, could the increasingly drastic divergence between the children's English speaking in Louisiana and French-speaking in Québec be at least partly the result of the parents' communications around the table? In other words, over the five year period, could it be that the parents were speaking increasingly more English in Louisiana, and more French in Québec, influencing the children's choice of language? To help answer this question, we now turn to an examination of the parents' BPR's over the last three years of the study.

Parental Language Preference

To date, we have only calculated the mother's and father's BPR's for 1997, 1998, and 1999. For comparison purposes, Figure 3 shows average BPR's for both parents in Louisiana and Québec over this three year time frame.

[insert Figure 3 about here]

As can be seen, there is overall much less divergence between the parents' Louisiana and Québec French speaking. In other words, the parents' French speaking does not

fall off nearly as drastically as does the children's when in Louisiana. In 1997, the mother's Louisiana BPR was .96, and the father's was .87. In that same year, however, John's Louisiana BPR had fallen sharply (to .04, or essentially no French). In Québec that year, the parents' BPR's rose to .99 for both parents. That is, like the children, they spoke essentially only French during that summer's sojourn in the Canadian province In 1998, the mother's and father's Louisiana BPR's were .80 and .87, respectively, much higher than John and the twin's very low level of French speaking (.003 and .03) However, once in Québec, all the family members' BPR's once again rose to comparable levels, though the parents' uttered more French than the children did during this one summer recording (father's BPR=1.0, mother's BPR=.98). Back in Louisiana in 1999, the mother's and father's BPR's fell off somewhat, to .63 and .87 respectively, but nowhere near the tumble which the children's BPR's took (close to zero). However, in keeping with the pattern, once back in the French-speaking environment of Québec in the summer of 1999, the parents' and children's BPR's once again converge, with the mother's and father's BPR's rising to .91 and .99 respectively, and the children's BPR's rising above .90.

In short, what we see is the children's fairly sharp divergence from the predominantly French-speaking parents in Louisiana, where John and his sisters appear to be increasingly influenced by American English, but then convergence once the family is immersed in French-speaking Canada.

We wondered whether part of the explanation for the sharp divergence between the children's and parent's French speaking in Louisiana might be due to the children

reinforcing each other's English speaking. For example, could it have been that John initiated a conversation in English, say, about something which transpired in his Louisiana school, and the girls responded in English, setting up a cycle of conversation which was self-perpetuating. In other words, if John had initiated the same conversation in French, would it have been more likely that his siblings would have responded in French? Since so much of the children's conversation in the last couple of years in Louisiana was in English, it is hard to answer this question with any degree of precision without re-listening to many hours of tapes for the occasional French word–an arduous proposition indeed. However, since the parents spoke so much French in Louisiana, often in discussions with the children, as we tabulated word counts we were able to consciously make note of whether or not the children ever responded in French.

We were literally shocked by what we heard. The rule–rather than exception–was that entire conversations transpired between the parents and the children when either the father or mother spoke only French, and the children responded in only English. Since the parents' Louisiana French speaking did not fall off over the three years for which we have tabulated data, as it did for the children, the pattern becomes increasing striking as first John, than his sisters, move into adolescence. We therefore have to rule out "linguistic family atmosphere" around the table in Louisiana as a primary determinate of the children's increasing propensity to speak English in Louisiana. A better explanation is that it is the increasing influence of their school peer environments which dictates home language. This is particularly

telling when we consider that the twins spent up to three hours per day *immersed* in French within their school environment. It appears that, unfortunately, we do not see any obvious boost to their home French speaking as a consequence of their school French immersion. We must add, however, that we do see an obvious and dramatic effect on their reading and writing of the French language, a topic for another article.

Conclusions

So, then, what sort of conclusions can we draw regarding the effect of adolescence on the bilingual preference of our children? We can, it seems, state with confidence that the children's home language preference in Louisiana shifted from predominately French to overwhelmingly English as they moved from pre-adolescence into early adolescence, and in the case of John, into mid adolescence. Was this because they were losing mastery of the home, minority language? Not at all. Throughout this five year period during summers immersed in French-speaking Québec, the children's language preference shifted from English to French in a remarkably short time. Within weeks they were speaking no English.

Why, then, the diminishing French speaking around the home dinner table in Louisiana? Given the trends, which were very similar for John and the girls when adjusted for age differences, we have to conclude that it was the increasing influence of the external, American peer environments. A defining characteristic of adolescence is the child's search for identity apart from the parents. For the children in the study, who

they emulated was increasingly a function of who they "hung out with" at school–and not the parents. Their Louisiana friends were English speaking Americans. Moreover, even if those friends were learning their studies in the French language, as was the case of the twins' peers, English was overwhelmingly the preferred language of communication apart from academic activities.

That parental linguistic influence on the children was on the wane over the five year study is underscored by the fact that both the mother's and father's recorded dinnertime utterances continued to be predominately in French. Indeed, the average Louisiana BPR's for the mother and father were .80 and .87 respectively. That there was some decrease in the amount of French the parents were speaking at home in Louisiana is evident. Perhaps this is in part reflective of the much greater tolerance of and preference for English exhibited by the children. The authors will be the first to admit that keeping to their initial resolution to speak only French in the household became an increasingly difficult task as the children moved into their teenage years. Looked at another way, the children's linguistic influence over the parents has likely been increasing. Still, we have tape recorded evidence of entire discussions carried on with the children where the parents barely uttered a word in English–and the children uttered not one word in French. Simply put, these exchanges are but poignant reminders that the parental influence had fallen off drastically, and been replaced by the cultural influences of the children's peers–for whom English was the lingua franca.

What are the wider implications of our findings? Of course, it is difficult to generalize from a case study of only three subjects to a broader population. However, what we

found would be consistent with the literature on adolescent development which stresses that this is the time of life that an individual seeks his or her own identity apart from the parents, and within the context of their peer groups. What could our findings suggest with regards to bilingual adolescents in the United States? Based on our observations and data, we submit that one point which seems clear to us is that even if tremendous effort is exerted to preserve a minority language, if that language is not cherished by the adolescent's peer group, he or she will not speak it–even in the home. Thus, those who fear that English in the U.S. is somehow in danger of losing its preeminence seem to have it backwards: the endangered species are all the non-English minority languages.

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Figure 1

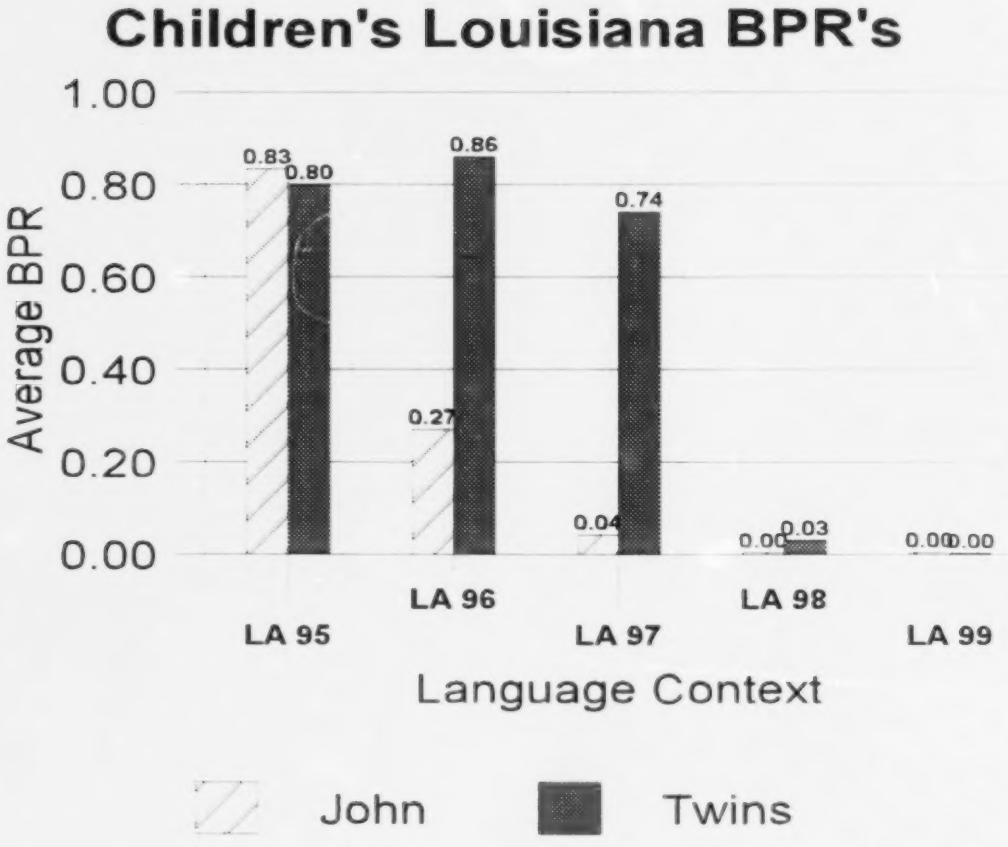

Children's Louisiana BPR's
1.00
0.80
0.60
0.40
0.20
0.00
Average BPR
0.83
0.80
0.27
0.86
0.04
0.74
0.00
0.03
0.00
0.00
LA 95
LA 96
LA 97
LA 98
LA 99
Language Context
John
Twins

Figure 2

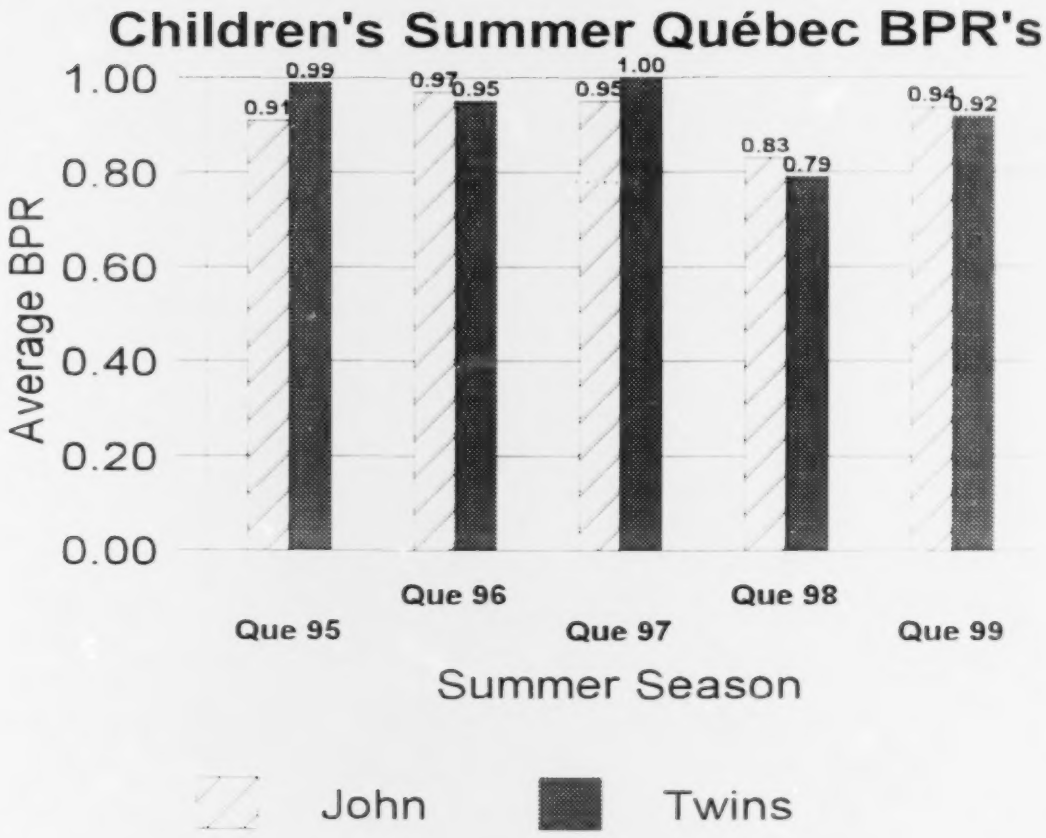
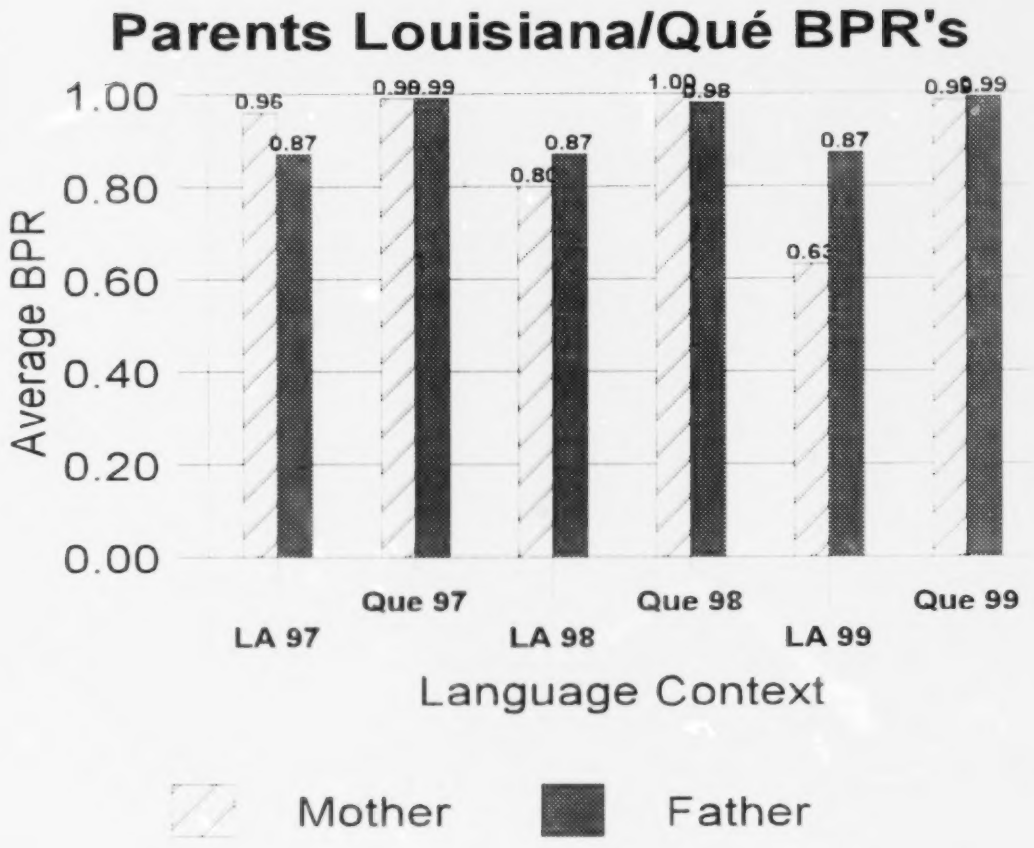

Children's Summer Québec BPR's
1.00
0.80
0.60
0.40
0.20
0.00
Average BPR
0.91
0.99
0.97
0.95
0.95
1.00
0.83
0.79
0.94
0.92
Que 95
Que 96
Que 97
Que 98
Que 99
Summer Season
John
Twins

Figure 3


Parents Louisiana/Qué BPR's
1.00
0.80
0.60
0.40
0.20
0.00
Average BPR
0.96
0.87
0.98 0.99
0.80
0.87
1.00
0.98
0.63
0.87
0.99 0.99
LA 97
Que 97
LA 98
Que 98
LA 99
Que 99
Language Context
Mother
Father